Sermon Series: The Four Building Blocks of Our Faith
Sermon Title: The Activities of Worship

Text: Ephesians 5:15-20 -- Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, 20 giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Introduction: Two young newlyweds were preparing to enjoy their first baked ham dinner in their new apartment. After unwrapping the meat and setting it on the cutting board, the wife chopped off both ends of the ham with a butcher knife, tossing the two small ends in the garbage can. "***Wait a minute***," said the mystified husband. "***Why did you do that? Why did you just cut off the ends of the ham like that?***" "***I don't know. My mother always did***," answered the wife. "***Maybe it helps bring out the flavor***." Unsatisfied with this answer, the husband called his mother-in-law. "***Can you tell me why you cut the two ends off of a ham before you cook it?***" "***Well***," said the mother, "***I'm not really sure why. That's just the way my mother prepared her ham, and it was always delicious***." As soon as he hung up, he called his wife's grandmother. ***"Grandma, we have an important question for you. Can you tell us why you cut the ends off of a ham before you cook it?***" "***Oh, my yes, dear***," answered Grandma in her quiet thin voice. "***I cut the ends of the ham off so it would fit in my pan***."

Traditions shape our lives and often take on great meaning, but it's important to know *why* we follow them. "**Because we've always done it that way" doesn't provide sufficient motivation to keep traditions alive, particularly when it comes to worship**. It's not enough to do the same things over and over because it's what we've always done. There has to be a good reason why we choose the various elements contained in a worship service. And, in fact, there is. These were the practices of the early church! The New Testament **prescribes and describes** what the elements of corporate worship were for the early church and should be for us. Let's look at them together.

But before we do, let me tell you WHY we are talking about this. Last week, we began a new preaching series that will take us up to Easter that I'm calling, "**The Four Building Blocks of Our Faith.**" **It's a call to personally evaluate our spiritual journeys and to decide what the next step is so that we can grow into a more fully devoted, spiritually equipped disciple of our Lord. Over the next three months, we'll be looking at these four areas --- WORSHIP, GROW, SERVE AND SHARE – which I'm sure you've heard us mention in Sundays past**. The hope is that we will ask ourselves which one(s) we need to give attention to if we're to be brave and bold soldiers who are increasingly pleasing our commanding officer – the Lord Jesus Christ in all we do (**See 2 Timothy 2:4**).

In our first message, we looked at the Argument for Worship as our PURPOSE, PRACTICE, PRIVILEGE AND PROOF. You can listen to that message by going to our website at **www.riverridge.online**. Now, we're going to consider the various parts of our worship service so that you know WHY we do what we do when we gather together to exalt the Lord. Let's start with this one.

The Greeting (Romans 16:16 -- Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you; Luke 7:45 -- You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet; 1 Peter 5:14 -- Greet one another with the kiss of love). In the early days of the church the kiss, as a token of peace, friendship, and brotherly love, was frequent among all people. **Christians used it in their public assemblies, as well as in their occasional meetings**. It was called a holy kiss because it was not sensual, but a simple display of love and honor. This custom was set aside, not because it was abused, but because, the church grew to where it became impossible to carry out. In some countries, the kiss of friendship is still common and rarely, if ever, abused. The shaking of hands is now substituted for it in almost all Christian congregations. Here at River Ridge, we don't include it IN every service, but we do encourage our church family to greet one another in Christ.

The Fellowship (**Acts 2:42 -- They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship; 1 John 1:7 -- But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin**). The word "fellowship" means to "share in common." Fellowship is more than just a group of Christians hanging out with one another. It refers to a partnership or sharing in the things of Christ (**1 Corinthians 1:9 -- God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful**). Among other things, it is used in the Scriptures in relation to (**1**) sharing in the blood of Christ (**1 Corinthians 10:16 -- The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation (fellowship) in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?**); (**2**) sharing our resources with one another for the sake of Christ (**Philemon 6 --… and I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ**); **2 Corinthians 8:4-5** – (Paul says of the churches in Macedonia)2 … **begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief (fellowship) of the saints—and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us**); and (**3**) sharing in the sufferings of Christ (**Philippians 3:10 -- … that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death**). So, when we fellowship together on Sunday mornings, it should be with the recognition that our Lord is the focal point of everything we do.

The Prayer (**Acts 2:42 -- And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers**)**.** This is not referring to personal prayers, but those offered by the body in a corporate setting, a time for the body to seek the face of God together. This means that the person leading us in prayer is praying not just for him/herself but for everyone. This kind of prayer takes some thought and preparation. I appreciate it when people I ask to lead us in prayer here at the church take time to prepare. In more than a few cases, they write it out! I remember at my last church, a young person said that he preferred it when someone just spontaneously prayed in the service for the congregation because that method seemed to be more genuine. That's when I reminded him that the book of Psalms is, in the vast majority of cases, prayers that were written down and meant to be prayed by God's people. If you're ever asked to pray in church and you agree to do so, I recommend that you review some of the prayers of Scripture, especially the Lord's prayer, and let them serve as your guide.

The Word of God (*See 1 Timothy 4:13*). Paul instructed Timothy to devote himself to three things which were considered familiar activities in the congregation until he was able to come. The idea is that these are the very same things that Paul will do when he comes to Ephesus.

A. **The reading of the Word** (*See Acts 13:15*; *1 Thessalonians 5:27; Colossians 4:16*). God's Word has power all by itself (*See Hebrews 4:12*).
B. **The preaching of the Word**. The word means to 'exhort or encourage' and probably refers to application to life (*See Romans 15:14*).
C. **The teaching of the Word**. The teaching of the Word has to do with explaining the truth faith so that believers are able to recognize heretical teachings (*See Ephesians 4:11-14*).

The Music (*See Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; 1 Corinthians 14:26; 1 Timothy 3:16*). I doubt that there is a more emotional topic to be discussed by believers than that of music. We have a tendency to break down our music into two categories: Hymns (meaning 'old') and choruses (meaning 'new'). The scriptures do it differently. There were Psalms (from the Old Testament), hymns (for an example see *Philippians 2:6-11*) and spiritual songs (spontaneous words sung in the Spirit -- these created problems that had to be addressed in *1 Corinthians 14:15*.) The purpose of singing in the worship service was twofold: **to edify or build up the body and to praise the Lord**. We have intentionally chosen to have a blended style of music in our worship services. We do this so that people from every generation can be built up in Christ and connect in a meaningful way in worship.

During World War II, all kinds of production involving metals, such as iron, copper, and brass, that was non-essential to the war effort were halted by the American government. This was because these metals were

needed to make guns, tanks, and artillery. Many musical instrument makers were affected by the new regulations, which meant that either they had to manufacture something else the military could use, or wait for the war to end, which was as good as going out of business. Piano makers Steinway & Sons was also affected by the restrictions. Instead of shutting down their factory, Steinway decided to bide their time manufacturing parts for troop transport gliders. Steinway's patience was rewarded when the US Military granted them a contract to make heavy-duty military pianos. By June 1942, Steinway's workers had designed a small upright piano, no more than forty inches wide and weighing 455 pounds. It was light enough to be carried by four soldiers. Each piano was treated with special anti-termite and anti-insect solution and sealed with water-resistant glue to withstand dampness. The best part was— the piano used only 33 pounds of metal, about a tenth as much as a typical grand piano. Known as "Victory Verticals," these pianos could be packed into crates and conveniently dropped by parachutes along with tuning equipment and instructions. An estimated 2,5000 pianos were dropped to American soldiers fighting the war in three continents. Steinway's pianos continued to serve the military well after the war was over. When the nuclear-powered submarine *USS Thomas A. Edison* was built in 1961, a Steinway upright was installed in the crew's mess area at the request of its captain. The instrument remained on board until the sub was decommissioned in 1983. **(Source: Kaushik, "That Time When America Air-Dropped Pianos for Troops in Battlefields," Amusing Plant (7-12-19)). The US military knows the importance of music and singing for the troops' morale. God's people have also sung through the ages, from the shore of the Red Sea (Exodus 15:1-21), to the battlefield (2 Chronicles 20:21-23), and from deep within dungeons (Acts 16:25). Believers know that singing "songs, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Colossians 3:16) is a powerful encouragement and an act of worship.**

The Giving of Our Gifts. Giving is an act of worship (Philippians 4:18 -- I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God). The words "a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God" call to mind a burnt offering. The aroma of the sacrificial fire would drift heavenward to God's nostrils with pleasing effect. Why do we give in the worship service? It is a demonstration of our submission to the Lord. He commands us to give (**Luke 6:38 -- … give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you***).* You might be wondering how are our funds used.

- **We give to support those in need** (**See Romans 15:26; Hebrews :16; James 2: 14-16 -- What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?***)*.
- **We give to support ministry, including those who labor on behalf of the church** (**1 Corinthians 9:7-10 -- Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk? 8 Do I say this merely from a human point of view? Doesn't the Law say the same thing? 9 For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it about oxen that God is concerned? 10 Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because when the plowman plows and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest**).

The Public Confession of Our Faith (*See Matthew 10:32; Romans 10:9; 1 John 4:15; 2 Corinthians 9:13*). This was accomplished in creeds. A creed is a statement that expresses some of the basic beliefs of the Christian faith (*See 1 Corinthians 15:3-6*). ***These creeds were often spoken during baptism*** (*See 1 Peter 3:21*). Some examples of the kind of statements spoke in a creed are: Jesus is Lord (*See Romans 10:9*); Jesus is the Son of God (*See 1 John 4:15*); Jesus Christ has come in the flesh (*See 1 John 4:2*); God is One (*See James 2:19*).

The Ordinances (*See 1 Corinthians 11:23-26*). Communion was practiced in the early church. Paul received this ordnance from the Lord and passed it on to them. It was done for two reasons:

- **To remember Christ** - When we eat the bread and drink the cup, we are reminded that we share in the benefits earned for us by Christ's death.
- **To proclaim Christ** - We publicly declare salvation comes through none other**. D. L. Moody made a mistake on October 8, 1871.** He preached to his largest audience in the city of Chicago. The text had been, **"What will you do then with Jesus who is called the Christ?"** He said something he had never said before and, frankly, never said again. He was very tired and because of that he said to his audience after he presented the gospel, "**Now I give you a week to think it over. And when we come together again, you will have opportunity to respond**." Then Ira Sankey came and began to sing. Before he could finish the song, one could hear the blare of the siren in the streets as the Great Chicago Fire broke out leaving one hundred thousand people homeless and hundreds of dead. D. L. Moody rose to the occasion a few months later and said, "**I would give my right arm before I would ever give an audience another week to think over the message of the gospel. Some who heard that night died in the fire**." As we prepare for the Lord's Table we will learn from His mistake. (Present the Gospel.) BY THE WAY, WE WOULD ALSO INCLUDE BAPTISM HERE IF WE HAD THE ABILITY TO BAPTIZE NEW BELIEVERS HERE IN THE CHURCH. That certainly seemed to be the practice in the early church.

The Blessing. *(**To be addressed at the end of the service in the giving of the benediction**.) There was at least one more element found in the worship services of the early church. It was the blessing, or what we call the benediction. **The Random House Dictionary** defines a benediction as the invoking of a blessing, especially at the end of a religious service. It is the promise of future blessing from God to those who walk in obedience to Him. It was common to find such blessings extended to the people of God (**See Numbers 6:24-26; 2 Corinthians 13:14**).* **A blessing is an authoritative pronouncement of God's presence, favor, and activity**. It is a statement made, not a request asked. This means that when you sit in church, and the time of the benediction comes, take a moment to sit and receive these words. The benediction is a powerful moment where you are invited to realize the truth of God's presence and activity. The purpose of a benediction is to declare a reality. It speaks a spiritual fact about your life.

Conclusion: Why have we spent the last two weeks on worship? **Ralph Waldo Emerson** famously said, "**What we are worshiping we are becoming**." In other words, our deities shape our identities. Let us call this **Emerson's Law** and consider it in the lives of two men: The evolutionary scientist **Charles Darwin** once wrote in his autobiography: "My chief enjoyment and sole employment throughout life has been scientific work." From this work, he added, "I am never idle," as it is "the *only* thing which makes life endurable to me." What effect did devoting himself to scientific work have on the person Darwin became? Up to the age of thirty poetry … gave me great pleasure, and … I took intense delight in Shakespeare. … But now for many years I … found it so intolerably dull that it nauseated me … My mind seems to have become a kind of machine for grinding general laws out of large collections of facts. (This) loss is a loss of happiness … (I became) "a withered leaf for every subject except Science" (which he saw as "a great evil"). **Now consider Emerson's Law (what we worship we become) at work in the life of another influential genius, theologian Jonathan Edwards**. At age 19, Edwards wrote, "**Resolved ... to cast my soul on the Lord Jesus Christ, to trust and confide in him, and consecrate myself wholly to him." Later in his life Edwards reflected on how his object of worship affected his soul over the years: "[It] brought an inexpressible purity, brightness, peacefulness and ravishment to the soul. In other words, it made the soul like a field or garden**." Two gifted men. One became "a withered leaf" and the other a "garden." The object of their ultimate devotion shaped the very different kind of men these two became. **That's why we're talking so much about worship!**